



The Florida Prison Evangelist

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Prison Evangelist

“...He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners...” Luke 4:18

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The Gospel Reaches Home

Every inmate we reach has family. When he or she is baptized they are excited about their new life and want to share the Gospel with others, especially their family. We realize that many inmates have burned their bridges with their family, but as the family sees the change of their loved one, they recognize the power of God's Word to transform lives.

Al has been at RMC Lake Butler for 4 years. Initially, he had little interest in the Bible. Al watched the brothers and saw the peace and joy they had. Al was tired of his old life, yet not sure if he could change. He loved to read and through a brother read Muscle and a Shovel by Michael Shank. Al was the fourth man to be baptized as a result of this book. Al has a great and supportive family and shared the book with them.

His mother, Linda, pictured above, read the book with great interest. Al asked me if there was a congregation near his mother. I knew of Central in Ocala and have known Art Jackson, one of the elders, for many years through their work in the prison ministry at Marion and Lowell prisons. Art and his wife Barbara studied with Linda and she was baptized into Christ by Art.

Linda has been faithful to the Lord and her congregation ever since. She says, “Central is a wonderful place to be, that she is learning so much about the Bible and has a better outlook on life; it is like the sunshine has come out of the clouds.” Her daughter is also studying the Word. There are three other families I know of with the same results.

I have to admit, than when I first read Muscle and a Shovel, I was not that impressed. For those in prison that are exposed to every kind of teaching, the book has helped seekers get clarity. Families of inmates are often great soil for the Gospel.



Six Born Into the Kingdom

A small sample, like Pentecost, was witnessed, May 18 at the “sallyport” of the Highlands County Jail when six precious souls were baptized into Christ for the remission of sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:37-39). These men were much like those in Berea (Acts 17:11,12) who were hungry for the Word and searched it out! Then they acted on saving faith.

Beyond these men are families! I feel a little like the woman who gave birth to six babies... of course, not the physical pain but the burden of care for those lives. It cannot be done alone by mother or by me. That is where the body of Christ comes into the picture. PLEASE remember these six babes in prayer and as opportunity is presented, in action. I surely covet your prayers in this work of our heavenly Father. Article by Frank Parker of Sebring (pictured above).

Frank taught and baptized Ronnie Crocker, Director of Project Rescue. We never know the results that even one baptism can produce for the Lord in the years to follow. Frank has been doing prison ministry for almost forty years.

Florida Prison Ministry Benefit Dinner

Our first Annual Benefit Dinner will be held Thursday, September 15th at 6:30 P.M. at University City Church of Christ in Gainesville. Our keynote speaker will be Mark Redd, retired Warden from the Department of Corrections. Mark is now an elder at the Lake Butler congregation and oversees the work that Gary Wyder is doing.

This is an opportunity to hear from brothers whose lives have been transformed by the Gospel through the agency of prison ministry. They are out of prison, faithfully serving the Lord and being responsible members of our community. It will be an uplifting time for all. The dinner is free, donations will be requested. Please R.S.V.P. 386 496-3158 or garywyder@cox.net

Biblical Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a subject that comes up often in prison ministry. I have committed unconscionable acts; will God forgive me? How can I ever restore relationships with those I have hurt? If God has forgiven me, why am I still suffering the consequences?

Criminals often see themselves as victims. They were hurt and so they hurt others. Actually, that vicious cycle has gone on since Cain and Abel. In a number of classes I teach, the following material has proven to be very helpful. Maybe I am learning the “wrong” things in prison, but most of it I “stole” from many materials I read on the topic. Three great resources are Forgive For Good by Fred Luskin (2002), Resolving Everyday Conflict by Ken Sande (2011), and the best single book Wronged and Wounded, What Now? by Jason Noble (2013).

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Matthew 6:14,15

What Forgiveness is NOT:

- ◆ It is not condoning unkindness, nor excusing bad behavior. The offender may still have consequences to bear.
- ◆ Forgiveness is not forgetting that something painful happened. Rather it is about how I remember and if and when I choose to bring it up again. It is not holding the event against one (Isaiah 43:25, God chooses not to remember or hold our sins against us).
- ◆ Forgiveness is not an emotion.
- ◆ Forgiveness is not denying or minimizing my hurt or having to give up my feelings.
- ◆ Forgiveness does not mean reconciling with the offender. “Having an attitude of forgiveness rests on you, reconciliation depends on both your willingness and the offenders repentance.” Sande

What Forgiveness IS:

- ◆ Forgiveness is the peace I learn to feel when I stop renting out to much space in my mind to a grievance story. Thomas Chalmers said, “Unforgiveness is the poison we drink hoping others will die.”
- ◆ Forgiveness is for me, not the offender. I receive as much as I give.
- ◆ Forgiveness is taking back my power, not giving it up.
- ◆ Forgiveness is about my healing and not about the people that hurt me.
- ◆ Forgiveness is a trainable skill.
- ◆ Forgiveness helps me get control over my feelings.
- ◆ Forgiveness is becoming a resilient hero rather than a permanent victim.
- ◆ Forgiveness is a choice, a radical decision. I promise:
 - 1) I will not dwell on this incident.
 - 2) I promise not to bring the incident up and use it against the offender.
 - 3) I promise not to talk to others about this incident.
 - 4) I promise I won’t allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.
- ◆ Forgiveness is costly. My forgiveness cost the blood of Jesus. “When someone sins, they create a debt someone has to pay. Most of this debt is owed to God, but if they sin against you, part of the debt is owed to you. This leaves us with a choice, we can either take the payments on the debt, or make payments. Christ living in us will give us the strength to make payments.” Sande Forgiveness is costly because I lay down my rights to justice, money, etc.; just as Jesus emptied Himself as He came to Earth. Remember did God punish me immediately for the injustices I committed against others?

To forgive is to release one from the obligation of who I want them to be and to accept who they are. The attitude of forgiveness is an unconditional commitment I make to God.

